



Business & Social Science  
**IJRBS**

## Research in Business & Social Science

**IJRBS VOL 9 NO 1 ISSN: 2147-4478**

Available online at [www.ssbfnct.com](http://www.ssbfnct.com)

Journal homepage: <https://www.ssbfnct.com/ojs/index.php/ijrbs>

# The origin of oil palm social conflict in Laman Satong, Ketapang, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 02 December 19

Received in revised form 22 dec 19

Accepted 24 August 19

### Keywords:

Social Conflict

Oil Palm

Stock of Knowledge

Phenomenology.

### Jel Classification:

A14

## ABSTRACT

*This research aims to describe the process and reveal the origin of social conflict in the incoming oil palm investment. Twelve Subjects are involved in this research, located in Laman Satong Village, Ketapang District, Kalimantan Barat Province, Indonesia in February-May 2019. The results showed that a threat to society's identity meaning which depends on the forest was an origin of social conflict. The incoming of oil palm investment was considered as a threat because of the limited formal communication channel, through socialization meetings. This limitation indicated to slow down their stock of knowledge renewal, that related to their future fate. Thus, it creates worries that caused resistance and internal community conflict itself. Academically this research contributes to establishing the social conflict theory and stock of knowledge concept in terms of conflict in the incoming of oil palm investment.*

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## Introduction

Since commercially cultivated in 1911, Indonesian oil palm grew gradually, then slowed down when World War II struck in Europe and Japan occupied Indonesia territory (Stoler, 1983). Furthermore, it grew dramatically in the New Orde regime through assigning Cultivating Right to private oil palm companies and it aligned with Nucleus Estate Program. The number of the plantations became higher with addition oil palm cultivation by smallholders (Palupi et al., 2017). Based on the width of oil palm plantation area in Indonesia, Kalimantan Barat ranks second after Riau with an area of 1,503,058 hectares in 2017 (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2017a), it comprises 322 companies both National Plantations, Private Company Plantations and Smallholders (BPS, 2017 b). Meanwhile, Ketapang is the district with the largest oil palm plantation in Kalimantan Barat, reaching a total area of 387,254 hectares (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Kalimantan Barat, 2017).

The existence of oil palm provides benefit directly felt by oil palm farmers, in the form of income increase (Alwarritzi, Nanseki & Chomei, 2015). This increase also followed by public facilities improvement such as schools, worship places, health facilities (Nasurur, Tahitu & Kakisina, 2017). The oil palm itself has many benefit, such as additional raw materials for food, cosmetic ingredients, soap and medicine, biodiesel raw material (Budidarsono, Susanti & Zoomers, 2013). In addition, the oil palm plantation is a labor-intensive business sector that can absorb a significant number of workers, at least 3.3 million workers were directly absorbed up to 2016 (BPS, 2017a; Budidarsono, Susanti & Zoomers, 2013). Furthermore, the existence of oil palm plantations can accelerate the development in the regions and open access to remote areas (Obidzinski, Dermawan & Hadianto, 2014).

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Beside the benefit, the presence of oil palm is reported to possess predicament. It ranges from illegal land acquisition, human rights violation especially to indigenous people, social conflict, poor labor condition, to collusion which leads to trade monopoly. Corrupt practices happen at all levels, including workers, supervisors, estate managers, cooperatives, oil palm companies, local governments and security forces (Li, 2015; Rist, Feintrenie, & Levang, 2010). Then, based on the report by Agrarian Reform Consortium, agrarian conflict tends to increase from time to time, it was recorded that in 2017 there were 659 conflicts dominated by plantation conflicts by 32% or around 208 cases (Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, 2017).

The purpose of this research is to describe the process and discover the origin of the social conflict in the emergence of oil palm investors. Academically, this research contributes to the relevance of social conflict theory with Alfred Schutz's theory about the framework to investigate the origin and the process of the social conflict. Practically, this research portrays the description of the situation which took place when the investors of oil palm entered a location, so it can be used as a measure to anticipate the negative impacts of the conflict. To achieve it, this research was conducted in Laman Satong, Ketapang, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia with phenomenological approach. This location is selected because the oil palm investment is relatively new, starting around 10 years ago, so the collective memory of the actors are still intact, it will be useful to further study the detail of the process.

## **Literature Review**

A number of researches revealed that the existence of oil palm plantation leads to environmental damage such as, deforestation, the decrease of wild animals and nature conservation (Cahyandito & Ramadhan, 2015; Lee et al., 2014; Nantha & Tisdell, 2009). Besides environmental issues, oil palm manufacturing also creates human rights conflicts and violation (Abram et al., 2017; Colchester & Chao, 2013; Humaedi, 2014; Kurniawan & Syani, 2012). Furthermore, according to the study conducted by Barreiro et al., (2016), conflicts in oil palm plantations are related to land compensation, disputes in partnership execution, work opportunities for local people, environmental damage, and the undone Corporate Social Responsibility programs. Consequently, those conflicts manifest in procedural manner, such as, complaint letter application, physical protest, like, strikes and boycott, vandalism, violence. Conflicts between oil palm companies and local inhabitants lead to material and psychological loss, even casualties. The action to figure out the origin of the conflicts is crucial to minimize the impact and loss. It is the reason why this research needs to be done.

Social conflict theory shows that the domination of the upper party who is in power position determines who is right or wrong (Bystrova & Gottschalk, 2015). Social conflict leading to violence in Indonesia involves the difference in ethnicity and religion, as well as, economy discrepancy factor (Setiawan & Barret, 2016). It is assumed that the emergence of investors in this industry results in economy gap, because they acquire large land without fair practice (Li, 2018). On the other hand, because social conflict involves more than one person, the question arises is that how the information distributes, perceived by others then it becomes collective action? According to Alfred Schutz, stock of knowledge is the organization of meaning mutually understood through intersubjective communication among the interlocutors (Sobur, 2013). In this context, Alfred Schutz's thought is relevant to investigate the cause of the social conflict about the emergence of oil palm investors.

On the other hand, methodologically, the paradigm of positive research with hypothesis and the gap between the researcher and the research object is hardly assumed to be objective. Alternatively, phenomenology offers meticulous measures to describe a phenomenon that we perceive consciously (Adian, 2010). Therefore, by this method, we can investigate the awareness of the citizens involved in the conflict.

## **Research and Methodology**

The research location was in Laman Satong Village, Matan Hilir Utara Sub-District, Ketapang District, Kalimantan Barat Province, Indonesia. This research was done from February to May 2019. This research was done in descriptive phenomenology approach. Data collection procedure was done in two steps, which are introductory research and field research. In introductory research, we did literature study related to research methodology, secondary data about local social and cultural characteristics and interview with key informant. Then, we selected the data based on: the role in the emergence of oil palm in their neighborhood, social status in the society, livelihood, ethnicity and religion background. There were several people recommended to become informant, but, we interviewed only 12 subjects considering the time limit and repetitive information. Subjects' profiles can be viewed in Table 1.

The field research was conducted using in-depth interview, with open-ended and unstructured questions. The research was done by inquiring based on guidelines to the subjects to reenact the process of oil palm investors initially enter Laman Satong Village. The follow-up questions were asked to probe the role of the subjects in the oil palm invest, what the subjects perceived before and after the oil palm investment?

During the interview, we did the recording, by asking subjects' consent and explaining the purpose of the research. The recording of the interview was transcribed and processed by the method by Richard H. Hycner, which was simplified by Thomas Groenewald (2004). It comprised of: 1) bracketing technique and phenomenology reduction; 2) the description of terms; 3) categorization of terms to form a theme; 4) the summary of each interview; 5) generating general and specific theme for each interview and collective summary.

**Table 1:** Profile of the Subjects Base on Ages, Jobs, Religion, Ethnicity, Educations

Subject	Age (Years)	Jobs	Religion	Ethnicity	Education	Additional Informations
I	46	Teacher	Christian	Dayaknesse (Tolak Sekayok)	University Degree	Missionary, Chief of Cooperative
II	50	Teacher	Catholic	Floresnesse	University Degree	Chief of Catholic Community
III	59	Private Worker	Moslem	Malay	Elementary School	Chief of Neighbourhood
IV	78	Farmer	Catholic	Dayaknesse (Tolak Sekayok)	Elementary School	Chief of Dayak Tribe
V	63	Farmer	Catholic	Dayaknesse (Simpang Kualan)	High School	Former of Village Chief
VI	63	Private Worker	Catholic	Dayaknesse (Mali)	Junior School	Former of Sub Village Chief
VII	66	Teacher Retirement	Catholic	Floresnesse	University Degree	Former of Elementary Principal
VIII	54	Farmer	Catholic	Dayaknesse (Tolak Sekayok)	Elementary School	Former Chief of Neighbourhood
IX	33	Contractor	Moslem	Javanese-Malay	High School	Former of Cooperative Committee
X	38	Technician	Katholik	Dayaknesse (Mali)	High School	Cooperative Committee
XI	60	Farmer	Catholic	Javanese	High School	Village Chief
XII	39	Priest	Christian	Dayaknesse (Ahe)	University Degree	

**Source:** Authors's Study, processed from direct interview transcript with the subjects (February-May 2019)

Research validation involved Subject I as a key informant. He was asked to review overall the result of the research, the approximately with the reality, especially the time synchronicity, and the involvement of subjects in the incoming of oil palm investment.

## Results and Discussion

The phenomenon when the investors entering the oil palm plantation in Laman Satong Village is categorized into: 1) Pre oil palm period (until 2006); 2) Oil palm penetration period (2007-2009); 3) Post oil palm penetration period (2010-2019). The pre oil palm period is the time of Laman Satong inhabitants lived up to 2006, before any plan or the socialization of oil palm. In that time, the livelihood of Laman Satong villagers depended on the forests.

“... Then, the locals here usually live relying on woods. To saw the log is pretty easy. I will tell my boss ‘I will go the forest tomorrow and I need to buy something before’. He will give me money...” (Subject VI.20)

Until 1979, Laman Satong villagers mostly consisted of Dayak Tolak Sekayok ethnic group. Subject V belongs to Dayak Simpang Kualan ethnic, which was assigned by a non-governmental organization as a village assistant staff. At that time, the Malay ethnic were only three households, including Subject III and the parents of Subject IX. The following year, as the action to increase the well-being and education of the community, as proposed by Subject V, six families from Batang Tarang were invited as local transmigrants, including Subject VII and IX. The arrival of the transmigrants focused on the development of the economy through the cultivation of wet-land rice and rubber. In the following years gradually, the educators were invited from Nusa Tenggara Timur Povince. Up to the penetration of oil palm, the total of Timor ethnic group was around 20 households.

“...Laman Satong usually did not utilise the low wet land... The Diocese of Ketapang cooperated with the Archdiocese of Pontianak looked for people who could or experienced in farming. So, Batang Tarang residents, the Batang Tarang parish. So, there were two people arriving here to survey the location at 1980. Then, they found it suitable and cooperated with the Parish, religious teachers, and so on. There were six households of us at the time...” (Subject VI.10)

The period of the penetration of oil palm took place when the first socialization happened in the middle of 2007, it started with the land acquisition and nursery deployment in 2009. In this period, there was a controversy about this investment among the villagers. It was shown in the socialization meeting about this plan at that time. The meeting was held by the company representative and a member of District Parliament Representative (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*, DPRD). In the middle of the socialization meeting, Subject II and VII inquired about the well-being and future of the villagers if the oil palm entered. How the prosperity of the villagers would be maintained, if the land and forest which had been the source of livelihood of them was taken over by the company and turned into oil palm plantation?

“...What the villagers feared was, when they have sold all their land and forest, they would not be more prosperous, that was their fear. And apparently, now they don't work at the oil palm plantation, they just watch others do...” (Subject II.26)

“...Actually, there was a concern among the villagers when all the land has become oil palm plantation, what their living will be in the future? This hesitation was being told by some in the socialization...” (Subject VII.126)

According to Subject II, one of District Parliament Representative member who were present at the socialization replied Subject II question with personal tendency to attack and insulted the profession of teacher. This incident led to the petition to reject oil palm investment in Laman Satong. Subject I spoke about Subject II being offended and initiated the petition to reject oil palm investment:

“...’You as a teacher should have understood, other people who are not teachers and are illiterate understand it well.’ Those words degraded my friends (including Subject II). Consequently, our university students at that place did a strike...” (Subject I.62)

Until the end of 2007, three socialization meetings has been done, but, the dissent was getting stronger. The discourse has developed into environmental issue, such as, flood risk and the side effects of oil palm itself. For example, the deforestation for planting oil palm ruined the fertile soil, killed other plants, the land will be exclusively for oil palm and will not be able to be rejuvenated.

“...Those who cannot accept are the ones who thought that oil palm plants are not eco-friendly. It means the deforestation and the decrease of land supply, which leads to land damage...” (Subject XII.32)

At the first socialization meeting, only Subject I and IX agreed to the oil palm investment. However, Subject IX was not involved because they were still underage. Their acceptance to the investment was due to the economic potential of oil palm. Subject IV, VIII, and XII were neutral, which means their opinions were swing between those who agreed and disagreed. Subject II, III, V, VI, X, XI showed disagreement by participating in signing the petition to reject the investment. These subjects’ stance will be summarized in Table 2.

Petition to reject the oil palm investment had been signed by about 60 people from 984 households in Laman Satong. Whereas, the majority did not openly accept the investment, but they definitely did not support the petition. The petition was not succeeded to chase away the investors. To further maintain his stand, Subject V, the then village head, resigned from his position.

**Table 2.** Subjects’s Knowledge about Oil Palm, Involvement and Attitude Pre- and Post- Oil Palm Investment Penetration

Subject	Information about Oil Palm	Involvement in the Process	Subjects’ Attitude	
			Pre- Oil Palm	Post Oil Palm
<b>I</b>	Listen, see, understand	Active	Pro oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>II</b>	Only listen	Active	Con oil palm	Neutral
<b>III</b>	Only listen	Passive	Con oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>IV</b>	Listen and see	Active	Neutral	Pro oil palm
<b>V</b>	Only listen	Active	Con oil palm	Con oil palm
<b>VI</b>	Only listen	Active	Con oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>VII</b>	Listen and see	Active	Con oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>VIII</b>	Only listen	Active	Neutral	Pro oil palm
<b>IX</b>	Only listen	Uninvolved	Pro oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>X</b>	Only listen	Passive	Con oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>XI</b>	Only listen	Active	Con oil palm	Pro oil palm
<b>XII</b>	Listen and see	Uninvolved	Neutral	Pro oil palm

**Source:** Authors’s Study, processed from direct interview transcript with the subjects (February-May 2019)

Despite the controversy, the oil palm company finally could enter the village in several conditions, which are: 1) they must obey the government regulation, as well as, customs; 2) the company must hire local people; 3) deforestation can only be done in the forest area which is not productive. The areas used for farming, ritual sites and housing are prohibited to use for oil palm. The statement of Subject IV about the requirement for oil palm investors:

“...The villagers, actually at that moment, the villagers did not agree to acquire the forest for oil palm plantation, I once thought they just used a small area of forest. I don’t know for sure how many thousand meters they used. The forest is only beneficial for wood companies. For the last several meeting, they would use ...” (Subject IV.24)

“... Actually, I was not that close with the group who agrees with the company. But, if the people all wanted to, I could do nothing else. So, I thought that we can work at the companies or in the plantations. In the meeting, we asked them to hire us in the oil palm plantations...” (Subject IV.28)

The period of the oil palm penetration was marked by the planting of the oil palm on the acquired land, from 2010 until the research was currently conducted. In parallel with the arrival of oil palm, subjects redefined the meaning of oil palm positively as an

opportunity to improve their livelihood. This was proved by the number of people working in the oil palm plantation. The revenue generated from selling their land and the salary as workers there was used to build and repair their homes, to buy motorcycles and cars, and for children's education.

After the penetration of the oil palm, only Subject V consistently showed contradictory position towards them. Subject II showed neutral stance. Furthermore, the subjects who initially were either neutral or unfavorable to the company then displayed shift of attitude to agree with them, were Subject II, III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, X, XI, XII. Meanwhile, Subject I and IX kept favorable manner towards the oil palm. Here is the statement of Subject V:

“...I have a principle from long time ago, that oil palm is a thing that cannot exist here. I try to make it...” (Subject V.6)

Based on the study done by Barreiro et.al (2016), the conflict happened in Laman Satong involved the availability and use of land issue, environmental damage and local human resources absorption potential. Conflict manifestation was still at the procedural stage, where, people showed disapproval by generating a petition. The oil palm rejecting act led the segregation of people who were favorable and unfavorable towards the investment. Along the way, the petition only gathered about 60 villagers' votes which are mostly migrants. As Setiawan and Barret (2016) stated about the elements involved in social conflicts, the one happening in Laman Satong was related to ethnicity sentiment, although it covered wider spectrum in the migrant group. Timor and Javanese ethnicity were the migrants in Laman Satong. Only the Malays who even were migrants were impartial. They tended to be neutral and followed the flow.

Based on the composition of the unfavorable party towards the oil palm investment is the influential figures, such as, the Village Head, the Neighborhood Head, the School Principal, the Teachers, and the Elders. The failure in the movement of rejecting the oil palm investment was caused by two factors, which are: 1) historical legitimacy, those who rejected the investment, although they were the influential figures, they were not native. The migrants who even had lived for decades there are still treated as outliers while encountering with crucial situation about the acceptance or disapproving the oil palm investment. However, in other aspects of society, the migrants are considered equal with the natives, for example, the rights and responsibilities regarding the customary conduct.

“...As I mentioned before, the term of migrants and natives is only about the sharing of revenue from the investment. But, in the social, culture, and governmental elements, we are treated equal like the native Laman Satong...” (Subject II.166)

This situation portrayed the legitimate strength of native figures in determining the future of their society. Based on the social conflict theory about upper class domination of which is right or wrong, by Bystrova and Gottschalk (2015), in the social conflict in Laman Satong, the native was the domineering group, despite the lack of social status in village government. The native deserved to determine their fate, not the migrants. Here is the statement of Subject IV:

“...When KAL arrived here, it was approved by the elders here. We, who have lived here for decades, are still regarded as migrants, we have no voice over...” (Subject VI.51)

Next, the resistance is reactionary act, it does not originate in the resistance against the massive ideological concept. Subject V consistently perceived his disapproval as a manifestation form of Dayak identity. Without forests, how they can identify themselves as a Dayak.

“...The Dayak ethnicity without river and forest is nothing, because in fact Dayak people are not strong. The nature where they are in is strong...” (Subject V.63)

The society's stock of knowledge is the accumulation of organized knowledge shared through intersubjective communication, therefore, it belongs publicly (Sobur, 2016). The perception of Subject V about the correlation the Dayak society and the environment did not resonate with the collective stance of Dayak Tolak Sekayok, because Subject V was from different Dayak community (Simpang Kualan). The disintegration of this perception led to the lack of support and the short duration of resistance (6 months). The peak of the symbolic resistance was the resignation as Village Head. It also implied that the resistance was personal. Refer to Alfred Schutz's concept of stock of knowledge, this situation showed the knowledge about identity perception of Dayak people owned by Subject V had not become the part of collective knowledge of Laman Satong villagers.

The stock of knowledge owned by the Laman Satong society is the livelihood relying on forests and farming. When the oil palm investment approached, it created fear about their future without forest and the land turned into oil palm plantation. This fear was reasonable because it was about how they obtained their primary needs, such as, rice and vegetables. When all the forest and land have become oil palm plantation, what if the water springs dried up, how they could obtain clean water, how they could catch fish if the river dried up. These fears persisted when the plantation company had run. Would they be accepted as workers regardless their education background and lack of skill. What if the workers were hired from out of the village. It is essential for the investors and government to communicate the updated the stock of knowledge, so, the villagers were more ready to accept or reject the investment along with the consequences.

The process of the penetration of oil palm investment used the formal communication line, that is socialization meeting. The fear faced by the people was delivered in the question and answer forum, but, information distortion happened both Subject II and VII against the member of Ketapang District Parliament Representative. Therefore, they focused on their personal defense rather on the substance of the meeting. Coincidentally, Subject II and VII are both Timor ethnic and teachers, then, they got the support from other teachers and people of Timor ethnic. The limitation of formal communication line caused the slow update of stock of knowledge that created the fear that led to the rejection act.

The fundamental problem which underlied the penetration of the oil palm investment in Laman Satong was the start of the forest wood scarcity, which had used to be the source of earning. Meanwhile, in the northern of Laman Satong, there is Gunung Palung National Park. It became a concern when the rising financial demand would risk the action of illegal logging by the villagers.

“...For the growth of economic demand, the people sometimes still depend on the nature, they can steal wood from the Gunung Palung National Park near us. So, the problems we see can be solved by the government program, the company that was supported by the government to improve the well-being of the society. We want a company which came to provide employment...” (Subject I.24)

In this situation, oil palm investment was accepted under several conditions, which is, they could not acquire the productive forests and areas. It was a guarantee for the villagers still could maintain their livelihood. To further ensure their future, the company was obliged to hire local people. The local people still relied on forest produce. Moreover, to protect the identity of Dayak tribe, the process of oil palm penetration complied the customs, as well as, the government regulation. It is expected that the existence of the local society was not eliminated because of the investment.

Methodologically, the phenomenology approach contributes in the more in-depth study about the conflict perceived by the actors, not just in the form of the conflict itself. The identity as Laman Satong villagers, the society of Dayak Tolak Sekayok whose livelihood was highly related to forest, was essentially the root of the social conflict in the oil palm penetration. The update of society's stock of knowledge was the determinant to prevent conflicts, which was needed to be conducted intensively, not only through formal communication line like the socialization meeting.

## Conclusions

This research intends to describe the process and discover the origin of the social conflict of oil palm penetration. According to the study of oil palm penetration in Laman Satong, Ketapang, Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia it can be concluded that the origin of the social conflict is the threat against the social identity relying on the existence of the forest. The emergence of oil palm investors which was perceived would take over the forest and land when the villagers were not ready. The lack of formal communication line, only in socialization meeting, hindered information access and acceleration of the updating the stock of knowledge about the oil palm investment. This limitation led to the slow update of society's stock of knowledge about their fate and future, which had used to lean on forest produce then had to shift to oil palm commodity that was still unfamiliar to them. This situation generated the fear related the availability and use of forest and land, local people hiring, and environmental damage threat.

The penetration of oil palm investment generated internal conflict between the approving and disapproving villagers. The rejection led by migrants who even held important position in the village failed because of the power of native legitimacy. The acceptance of the investment was led by the reduction of the forest wood supply, which had become the source of livelihood of the society. The oil palm investment was accepted under several conditions: beside complying the government regulation, the company also obeyed the customs; the company had to hire the local people; the land acquisition for the oil palm plantation was only for unproductive land.

Academically, social conflict theory and Alfred Schutz's concept of stock knowledge are relevant to analyse the conflict happening in the oil palm penetration process in Laman Satong. Practically, this research suggests that in any investment, the update of society's stock knowledge is crucial. The measures that are used are beyond formal communication line and legal compliance. Therefore, it will minimize the potential detrimental conflicts.

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